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EGYPT: Implications of Sadat's Death

The country is calm in the wake of Sadat's death, which appears to have been the result of an assassination plot by Muslim fundamentalist extremists, rather than a coup attempt.

Vice President Moubarek was wounded in the attack but has taken the leading role in its aftermath and probably will succeed Sadat through elections called for by the constitutional process.

Egyptian security officials believe the seven assassins belonged to a small clandestine fundamentalist group that included some military personnel. There is no evidence linking the group to outside powers.

Moubarek and the Succession Process

The Egyptian Constitution specifies that the speaker of the People's Assembly, a post currently held by Sufi Abu Talib, immediately assume the presidency and organize a presidential election to be accomplished in 60 days. The speaker cannot run for the office. This procedure was initiated yesterday, and today the Assembly is to select one candidate, whose name will be submitted to a popular referendum that will be held on Monday.

Sadat had picked Moubarek as his successor, and the Assembly apparently will comply with this recommendation. Leaders of the National Democratic Party, which is headed by Moubarek and has an overwhelming majority in the parliament, yesterday reportedly endorsed his nomination as president.

Sadat groomed Moubarek for the presidency. To ensure a smooth transfer of power, Sadat permitted Moubarek to develop his own power base--albeit one that did not challenge Sadat's position. Moubarek, a former commander of the Egyptian Air Force, oversaw military affairs for Sadat and sought to appoint trusted lieutenants to key posts in the military and intelligence services.

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Moubarek's succession appears almost certain, but he will have to gain the support of key interest groups to ensure a lasting hold on the presidency. The military's views will be critical. Over the years, some Army officers have privately expressed opposition to an Air Force officer in the presidency. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

If Moubarek's candidacy should falter, Defense Minister Abu Ghazala and Foreign Minister Kamal Hasan Ali are likely contenders. Abu Ghazala was reportedly slightly wounded in the attack. [REDACTED]

Policies of the New Government

The successor regime in Egypt probably will be preoccupied with efforts to consolidate its power for several months. Increased efforts to suppress the Islamic opposition, particularly in the military, are likely. A repressive atmosphere probably will prevail for some time. A one-year state of emergency was declared yesterday, and other security measures have been taken. Moubarek is likely to attempt to project a forceful and determined image in order to avoid an appearance of weakness in the face of any possible opposition. [REDACTED]

In foreign affairs, Moubarek and other establishment figures are closely identified with the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and support close ties with the US. Moubarek and Abu Ghazala may even move closer to the US on strategic issues in return for additional military equipment. In the past, they seemed less concerned than Sadat with the domestic political costs of close identification with the US, and both are strongly anti-Soviet. [REDACTED]

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The new regime probably will seek closer ties with the other Arabs, especially Saudi Arabia. Improved relations with the Saudis would raise the possibility of renewed Saudi economic aid and would be popular with most Egyptians. Such a development also would reinforce a successor's claim to leadership in the Arab world and thus further strengthen the new leader.

Moubarek or other Sadat supporters are not likely to renounce peace with Israel. Strains in ties with Israel might emerge, however, if Egypt improved its relations with the Arabs. After Israel completes its withdrawal from eastern Sinai in April 1982, a new Egyptian regime might be more inclined than Sadat to downgrade or even sever diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv to appease Riyadh and end Egypt's isolation in the Arab world. The Egyptians would move carefully to avoid giving Israel any excuse for military action, however, and probably would scrupulously adhere to the military disengagement aspects of the peace accords.

Israeli Perspectives

Israel's principal concerns are that Egypt may face a period of prolonged domestic instability and that Sadat's successor eventually could yield to Arab pressure to abandon the Camp David negotiation process and the peace treaty. Tel Aviv probably anticipates that its efforts to conclude a Palestinian autonomy agreement before Israel's final Sinai withdrawal next April will be hampered. The extreme rightwing Tehiya (Rebirth) movement already has called for postponement of the final Sinai withdrawal, and Israeli public support for this position probably would grow significantly if the new Egyptian leader departs from Sadat's peace initiative or appears not to have firm domestic control.

They probably hope that his death will further encourage opposition in the US Congress to the proposed AWACS sale to Saudi Arabia.

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Libya

The shooting of President Sadat has been hailed as a major victory by the Libyan regime, which has been calling for Sadat's ouster and, when possible, actively working toward that end since 1974. The day before the assassination, Libyan leader Qadhafi publicly reiterated Libyan support to the "Egyptian people in their efforts to remove Sadat." The remarks--although typical of Qadhafi's rhetoric against the Egyptian leader--will be interpreted by some as evidence of Libya's foreknowledge and possible complicity in the attack on the Egyptian leadership. This view will be reinforced by press reports that Egyptian exile leader and former Chief of Staff Saad Shazli, who has close ties to Tripoli, was involved in the attack. [REDACTED]

Sadat's death will open up both opportunities and dangers for Qadhafi. He may calculate that turmoil within the Egyptian political and military establishment will enhance prospects for Libyan efforts to subvert President Nimeiri. Qadhafi also can be expected to give financial and moral support to any Egyptian dissidents who are able to seek his help in exploiting problems in Egypt. [REDACTED]

At the same time, Qadhafi is likely to be acutely aware that he may be blamed for the assassination and that refinements on the actual nature of Libyan involvement, if any, will do little to mitigate the heightened danger to him. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Libyan forces near the border with Egypt have been placed on a higher state of alert, probably in response to the increased readiness posture of Egyptian units following the attack on Sadat. [REDACTED]

Sudan

Sudanese President Nimeiri has used his country's close relationship with Egypt to offset threats from Libya and will be concerned that Qadhafi might take advantage of the disarray created by Sadat's death to intensify pressure against the Sudanese Government. He

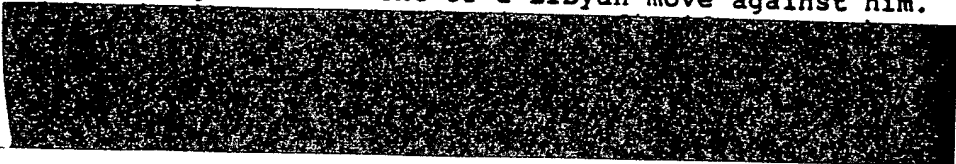
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probably will be seeking assurances from the new government in Cairo--as well as from the US--that aid will be forthcoming in the event of a Libyan move against him.



Arabian Peninsula

Most leaders of the Persian Gulf states will see Sadat's assassination as the result of his separate peace with Israel, his insensitivity to concerns of Islamic fundamentalists, and his deepening ties to the US. Each leader will reexamine his own vulnerability to these same dangers. The Saudis in particular will see the assassination as bolstering radical forces in the Middle East and increasing the danger to moderate governments. Gulf leaders will look for opportunities to counsel Sadat's successor, to put Egypt at a distance from the faltering peace process, and to repair its relations with other moderate Arab governments. Oman, the only Gulf state that has full relations with Egypt, may reemphasize its earlier requests to the US to postpone next month's combined US-Omani military exercise. 

Reaction in Moscow

The Soviets will anticipate long-term benefits from the removal of Sadat from the Middle East scene. He was their *bete noire*, who abrogated the Egyptian-Soviet friendship treaty, ended the Soviet presence in Egypt, and effectively opposed their having a role in the Middle East peacemaking process. Soviet media coverage of the assassination claimed that it was a result of internal Egyptian discontent with Sadat's signing of a peace treaty with Israel and his close military cooperation with the US--policies that are especially bothersome to the Kremlin. 

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Moscow, however, apparently has few assets left in Egypt after the most recent expulsions and is not in any position to capitalize immediately on Sadat's death. It will hope that Moubarek proves to be less anti-Soviet and pro-American than Sadat and will seek opportunities to influence him in that direction. The approach the Soviets take and the speed with which they proceed will be determined to a great extent by Moubarek's actions and the stability of post-Sadat Egypt.

West European Reaction

West European governments reacted with shock and dismay to Sadat's death. Most analysts believe that it is too early to tell what direction events in the region will take, but they hope that Egypt will remain a stable, pro-Western country willing to pursue a policy of peace with Israel. Sadat's death will not change the general perception in Western Europe that the most effective means to peace in the Middle East is through a recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people.

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